

# Influence of Putin's aggression against Ukraine on Indigenous Peoples of Russia



**The report by the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (iCIPR) and the Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial to the anniversary of the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine.**

***Second edition<sup>1</sup>, 23 February 2023***

## **Introduction**

After Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, the Russian Government turned its attention to civil society organizations. Draconian laws enacted since 2012 regulate the work of organizations engaged in activities deemed political by the Government. The constant harassment of these organizations by the authorities has made it next to impossible to openly and freely discuss Indigenous Peoples' rights, especially land rights and self-determination. A particularly worrisome aspect was the accelerating expansion of extractive industries on Indigenous Peoples' traditional lands, regulated and encouraged by the Government, without their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and paying neglect attention to the environmental standards.

As a result, today, the once vibrant Indigenous activist movement in Russia has been reduced to a handful of people. Those activists must be extremely careful, as anyone who openly questions the authorities' political and economic choices is at risk of criminal prosecution. A number of prominent [Indigenous rights defenders left the country](#)<sup>2</sup>, fearing for their safety. Some who stay in Russia experience arbitrary criminal prosecution initiated by the state or extractive industries.

After the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the repressive Russian legislation was much strengthened, and critical Indigenous voices fear persecution can no longer effectively stand up for their rights and publicly criticize the Government, its proxy organizations, and crony extractive businesses.

## **Indigenous soldiers in the war**

The war's most direct and unfortunate impact on Indigenous peoples is the participation of Indigenous soldiers in the Russian army fighting in Ukraine. Many experts and mass media have repeatedly pointed to the disproportionate conscription of Russian ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples into the army compared with the titular population of Russia. For example, according to the ["Ethnic and regional inequalities in the Russian military fatalities in the 2022 war in Ukraine"](#)<sup>3</sup> report, a soldier drafted into the war from Buryatia is about 100 times more likely to die than a resident of Moscow.

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<sup>1</sup> See the first edition of the report here - Russian Aggression Against Ukraine and Indigenous Peoples of Russia. Report by ICIPR - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/27991>

<sup>2</sup> New Report Highlights Indigenous Rights Violations in Russia - <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/new-report-highlights-indigenous-rights-violations-russia>

<sup>3</sup> Ethnic and regional inequalities in the Russian military fatalities in the 2022 war in Ukraine - <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/s43yf>

The other visible example is the drafting campaign in the Udege indigenous community Gvasugi in the Russian Far East (Khabarovsk krai). [According](#)<sup>4</sup> to the Russian Ministry of Defense, Sergey Shoigu, only about one percent (300 thousand persons) of the total Russian mobilization resource (25 million people) were mobilized. At the same time, in Gvasugi village, where only two hundred persons live, 14 men were [mobilized](#)<sup>5</sup>. That [consists](#)<sup>6</sup> of 11 percent of the total male population of the village and about 30 percent of the mobilization resource (men who could be sent to war according to their age and other standards).

Hundreds of deaths of Indigenous soldiers from Chukotka, Khabarovsk Krai, Tyva, Yakutia, and other Russian regions have already been [confirmed](#)<sup>7</sup>. However, the total number of Indigenous soldiers' deaths is difficult to estimate as many Indigenous peoples in Russia have Russian names, making it impossible to distinguish them from non-Indigenous servicemen in open databases. The Russian Government does not publish reliable data on fallen soldiers and makes no statistics on Indigenous Peoples' share in its [rare information reports](#)<sup>8</sup>.

Most Indigenous Peoples officially [recognized](#)<sup>9</sup> by Russia are numbered several thousand or even hundreds of people. So while any loss of life is a tragedy, for small-numbered Indigenous Peoples, it could be a question of their very survival. Tragically, many who return home alive will likely suffer from injuries and mental health problems. At the same time, Russia's healthcare infrastructure in remote areas where most Indigenous peoples live has [minimal capacity](#)<sup>10</sup> to address these issues.

In many poor remote areas where Indigenous Peoples live, even in the usual time, the military contract service was one of the few paid jobs available and better paid than many other public jobs. Today the Russian Government is [attracting](#)<sup>11</sup> disadvantaged and underserved people for the war in Ukraine, promising them a salary several times higher than the average wage in the region while [does not provide](#)<sup>12</sup> potential recruits with realistic information about what to expect in the war.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Partial mobilisation' of Russian reservists – a sign of Putin's desperation? -

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220921-partial-mobilisation-of-russian-reservists-may-reveal-putin-s-desperation>

<sup>5</sup> Подарки для семей мобилизованных доставили в национальное село Гвасюги - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/29376>

<sup>6</sup> Война и коренные народы России: проблемы статистического анализа - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/30103>

<sup>7</sup> Представители коренных народов России, погибшие на войне против Украины (список) - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/29542>

<sup>8</sup> Russia says 89 troops were killed in New Year's attack, blames use of mobile phones - <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-defence-ministry-says-89-killed-makiivka-blames-use-mobile-phones-2023-01-03/>

<sup>9</sup> Federal Law No. 82-FZ on ensuring traditional rights of sparsely distributed indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation - <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC079128/>

<sup>10</sup> The COVID 19 impact on indigenous peoples of the Russian Arctic, Siberia, and the Far East - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/6552>

<sup>11</sup> 'They're mostly after loans' Tuvans, trying to scramble out of poverty, are dying in a foreign war - <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/09/15/they-re-mostly-after-loans>

<sup>12</sup> Demoralised Russian soldiers tell of anger at being 'duped' into war - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/russian-soldiers-ukraine-anger-duped-into-war>

Still, a lot of male Indigenous Peoples' representatives attempted to avoid forced mobilization of the Russian army. While [some](#)<sup>13</sup> tried to disappear into forests pursuing their usual traditional activities, others had to [leave](#)<sup>14</sup> Russia, which again will negatively reflect on the general statistics of their small-numbered nations.

## **Influence of the war on the social and economic life of Indigenous communities**

Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, sanctions by Western governments were quickly followed by foreign businesses choosing to [leave](#)<sup>15</sup> the Russian market. International trade links between Russia and the West based on the exchange of raw materials mined mainly on the lands of the indigenous peoples of the Russian Arctic, Siberia, and the Far East for Western goods and technologies were almost destroyed during the war.

In an economy like Russia's one, closely linked to international trade, this led to immediate economic consequences felt by many within Russia. The country is already experiencing shortages of some essential supplies like [medicines](#)<sup>16</sup> and [aircraft](#)<sup>17</sup> produced by Western companies. The lack of such goods is hitting remote Indigenous communities especially hard, as many are only accessible by air transport much of the year and cannot receive high-level medical services in remote villages. According to our indigenous informants' reports from Russia, their communities have already met with the problem of runaway inflation and rising prices of consumer goods, especially in remote villages which do not have year-round access to the rest of Russia, except by air transport.

The sanctions influence various aspects of indigenous peoples' life differently in Russia. For example, indigenous hunters in Siberia were [unable](#)<sup>18</sup> to sell peltries, while fur hunting is the basis of their traditional economies. The cause of the problem is that Russia has lost access to the European fur auctions, which were the primary consumers of Russia's furs.

In other regions, indigenous communities met with the [problem](#)<sup>19</sup> of a lack of access or high prices on the western-produced equipment, which has long been used in the daily lives of Indigenous reindeer herders, hunters, fishermen, including snowmobiles, off-road transportation, satellite communications etc.

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<sup>13</sup> В карельском селе мужчины ушли в лес за клюквой и избежали мобилизации - <https://m.pln24.ru/allworld/462494.html>

<sup>14</sup> "I just want to help my people," says exiled Sámi leader - <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/indigenous-peoples/2023/02/i-just-want-help-my-people-says-exiled-sami-leader>

<sup>15</sup> Более 40% иностранных компаний решили уйти из России - <https://www.dw.com/ru/s-nacala-vojny-bolee-40-inostrannyh-kompanij-resili-ujti-iz-rossii/a-63639653>

<sup>16</sup> Прокладки и сахар снова на полках. Дефицита больше не будет? - <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/04/28/prokladki-i-sahar-snova-na-polkah-defitsita-bolshe-ne-budet>

<sup>17</sup> Авиакомпания на Камчатке закрылась из-за отсутствия самолетов - <https://ria.ru/20220520/kamchatka-1789782772.html>

<sup>18</sup> Бардалеев: Санкции США и ЕС виноваты в падении цен на забайкальскую пушнину - <https://chitamedia.su/news/1415937/>

<sup>19</sup> «В Россию и на Запад едут разные контингенты украинских беженцев» - <https://iz.ru/1351412/sergei-gurianov/v-rossii-i-na-zapad-edut-raznye-kontingenty-ukrainskikh-bezhentcev>

## The war and Russian extractive industry: lowering environmental and human rights standards

Using the "wartime" and sanctions pretext, Russian authorities and mining businesses are subsequently [lowering](#)<sup>20</sup> environmental standards in the country to "support the Russian economy". According to the [Russian Socio-Ecological Union \(RSEU\)](#)<sup>21</sup>, this trend includes: reducing mandatory requirements for ensuring ecological safety; complicating access and depriving citizens of the right to participate in issues related to nature and habitat protections; reducing state oversight over the activities of environmentally hazardous facilities; reduction or cancellation of the legislative ban on economic development of protected areas and requirements for forest conservation; extension of deadlines for federal environmental projects and state programs beyond the responsibility of the current generation of officials.

One of the most dangerous tendencies is the intentional shrinking of the State Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA) requirements. Aleksandr Fedorov, a member of the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology's Public Council, [mentioned](#)<sup>22</sup> several weakening procedures for the state environmental assessments initiated by state or business: reduce the scope of specific SEIAs, dilute the range of issues addressed by SEIAs, decrease the importance of SEIAs in decision-making; limit civil society participation during SEIAs and other assessments; depriving citizens of the right to organize their own public environmental impact studies.

For example, in November 2022, in Lovozero village in the Murmansk region where Russian Sami live, the regional Government organized [public hearings](#)<sup>23</sup> on changing the status of the Seydyavr State Nature Reserve. This Natural Reserve has created near Lovozero village around the sacred Seidozero lake, where several Sami historical and religious significance sites are located.

According to the regional Government, the main [idea](#)<sup>24</sup> of the reorganization is the increasing tourist traffic to Seydozero and the possibility of rare-earth metals mining for Lovozero mining and processing plant on the Natural Reserve territory. Expanding the potential of rare-earth metal mining became necessary for Russia due to Western sanctions on the supply of microelectronics, which Russia [needs](#)<sup>25</sup> primarily to develop its military industry. Thus, the reorganization of the reserve threatens by mass tourism on the sacred lake (to which the Sami themselves have [limited](#)<sup>26</sup> access), on the one hand, and pollution of the territory due to the expansion of mining operations in this area on the other hand.

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<sup>20</sup> Russia slashes environmental protections as war rages, economic crisis looms - <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2022/06/russia-slashes-environmental-protections-war-rages-economic-crisis-looms>

<sup>21</sup> Российский социально-экологический Союз и Госсовет России - за экологическое благополучие - <https://rusecounion.ru/ru/deecologicalization>

<sup>22</sup> Environmental lawlessness during wartime - <https://uwecworkgroup.info/environmental-lawlessness-during-wartime/>

<sup>23</sup> В Ловозере прошли общественные слушания по созданию природного парка «Сейдъяввр» - <https://www.hibiny.com/lovozero/news/item-v-lovozere-proshli-obshchestvennye-slushaniya-po-sozdaniyu-prirodnogo-parka-seidyavvr-277394/>

<sup>24</sup> Отчет о научно-исследовательской работе по теме «Обследование и обоснование реорганизации государственного природного заказника регионального значения «Сейдъяввр» в одноименный природный парк». Книга 2. - [https://indigenous-russia.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/materialy\\_keo\\_seidyavvr.pdf](https://indigenous-russia.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/materialy_keo_seidyavvr.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Корпоративный конфликт недели: как делят Соликамский магниевый завод - <https://ko.ru/articles/korporativnyy-konflikt-nedeli-kak-delyat-solikamskiy-magnievyy-zavod/>

<sup>26</sup> Саами запретили посетить сакральное место!!!! - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/26392>

The weakening of the SEIAs' procedures led to formalizing public hearings, now the almost only approach for local communities, including indigenous ones, to participate in decision-making regarding new development projects on their communal lands. Considering the Lovozero example, the local authorities [gave only six days](#)<sup>27</sup> after the public hearings for local residents to study a rather complex, technical 170-page document of the Natural Reserve reorganization rationale and present their opinion.

Similar nominal public hearings procedures are applied to other indigenous communities around the Russian Arctic, Siberia and the Far East, including [among reindeer herders](#)<sup>28</sup>, who rarely have the opportunity to visit villages to participate in the public hearings.

The other significant tendency is escaping Western mining companies, investors and buyers from Russia and their replacement by Russian, Chinese, and other non-Western businesses. For example, this summer, president Putin [raised the stakes](#)<sup>29</sup> in his economic war against the West and signed a decree that seized complete control of the Sakhalin-2 gas and oil project in Russia's Far East to force the oil Shell company out of Russia. Today the Sakhalin-2 project operates by Russian natural gas state monopoly Gazprom which has been repeatedly proven to [violate](#)<sup>30</sup> the rights of indigenous peoples.

That means Russian indigenous communities lost their opportunity to apply to Western mining businesses on international human rights and environmental standards, which they follow more thoroughly than Russian or non-Western companies.

The other challenge connected to the war is today's impossibility of organizing independent research on mining business influence on indigenous communities or verifying the Russian stakeholders' information. The country is closed to international field visits. During the war, several international institutions, including the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance ([IRMA](#))<sup>31</sup> and the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, canceled their country visits.

## **Victimization of civil society institutions**

The war in Ukraine has provided the Russian Government with a new opportunity to tighten an already minimal civic space in Russia. Soon after the start of the war, Russian authorities [blocked](#)<sup>32</sup> the last remaining independent media outlets in Russia, Russian language

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<sup>27</sup> How Russia Implements the Free, Prior and Informed Consent Principle - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/29948>

<sup>28</sup> «Газпром» ответил на претензии ямальских КМНС - <https://uralpolit.ru/news/yanao/06-01-2023/268139>

<sup>29</sup> Russia seizes control of Sakhalin gas project, raises stakes with West - <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russia-decree-sakhalin-2-project-knocks-mitsui-mitsubishi-shares-2022-07-01/>

<sup>30</sup> Как национальный вопрос стал головной болью для эвенков Хандинской общины - <https://baikal.mk.ru/social/2021/12/15/kak-nacionalnyy-vopros-stal-golovnoy-bolyu-dlya-evenkov-khandinskoy-obshhiny.html>

<sup>31</sup> Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance - <https://responsiblemining.net>

<sup>32</sup> Russian liberal radio mainstay Ekho Moskvy closes after pulled off air - <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/03/russian-liberal-radio-mainstay-ekho-moskvy-closes-after-pulled-off-the-air-a76730>

media based abroad, and [access](#)<sup>33</sup> to various social media outlets. The Government [continues](#)<sup>34</sup> its destructive campaign to expel from the country the independent human rights, environmental and expert organizations that, in the past, have provided invaluable assistance to Indigenous communities in defending their rights to lands, resources, and self-determination. As a result, the overwhelming majority of Russia's Indigenous population lost access to independent sources of information except for the government ones, while indigenous communities lost the opportunity to apply for help from independent media and human rights organizations.

The criminal prosecution of [Segey Kechimov](#)<sup>35</sup> could be considered an example.

Sergey Kechimov is a Khanty indigenous person who lives with his wife near the sacred Khanty lake Numto in Khanty-Mansiisk autonomous region. This region is the most oil-rich in Russia. One of the biggest Russian oil companies, "[Surgutneftegas](#),"<sup>36</sup> has been exploring and extracting oil near the lake since 2012. Since then, Sergey Kechimov has been trying to protect Khanty's traditional lands against oil pollution near his reindeer herding camp. In 2017 after a conflict with oil workers whose dog mauled his reindeer, Sergey Kechimov was sentenced by a local court for threatening oil workers.

In those days, indigenous communities, independent media, human rights and environmental organizations were able to create a powerful public campaign to protect Kechimov's rights as a victim of authorities and the oil industry on [national](#)<sup>37</sup> and [international](#)<sup>38</sup> levels. Even though Sergey was finally sentenced, the sentence was relatively painless - 30 hours of communal work only.

But in December 2022, he was [sentenced](#)<sup>39</sup> again for threatening oil workers with already six months of liberty restriction, and immediately after the court, he was again arrested by the local police, which brought an accusation against him for police disobedience.

Today the investigation against him continues, and nobody from human rights organizations or independent media can support him as there are no remaining such organizations in the region now. In 2022 Sergey Kechimov didn't receive any legal support or media attention, as well as support from his own community. While some local indigenous organizations [serve](#)<sup>40</sup> the interests of the regional authorities and oil companies, others are intimidated by the recent [strengthening](#)<sup>41</sup> of the repressive Russian legislation and can not support Sergey Kechimov in his fight.

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<sup>33</sup> Russia bans Instagram and Facebook as court declares Meta an 'extremist organisation' - <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/03/21/ukraine-war-facebook-temporarily-allows-posts-calling-for-violence-against-russians-or-put>

<sup>34</sup> Moscow Helsinki Group banished by court order in Russia - <https://www.euronews.com/2023/01/25/moscow-helsinki-group-banished-by-court-order-in-russia>

<sup>35</sup> Indigenous Russia - Сергей Кечимов tag - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/tag/кечимов-сергей>

<sup>36</sup> Surgutneftegas company - <https://www.surgutneftegas.ru/en/>

<sup>37</sup> Один на озере нефти - <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27199956.html>

<sup>38</sup> The reindeer herder struggling to take on oil excavators in Siberia - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/17/reindeer-herder-oil-excavators-siberia>

<sup>39</sup> Сергей Кечимов вновь признан виновным в угрозе убийством сотрудникам нефтяной компании "Сургутнефтегаз" - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/28640>

<sup>40</sup> Депутат окружной Думы Александр Новыхов: «Югра единственный регион в мире, где есть таежное оленеводство» - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/9456>

<sup>41</sup> Russians laws on civil society are becoming more repressive - <https://www.nhc.no/en/russian-foreign-agent-law-becoming-more-repressive/>

## Intimidation of indigenous critique voices

Indigenous activists and indigenous rights defenders also didn't avoid prosecution from authorities.

In February 2022, the next day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Chukchi student Mark Zdor who studied at the St. Petersburg University named after AI Herzen, was [arrested](#)<sup>42</sup> by the police after he, with his classmates, participated in the antiwar protest action in St. Petersburg. Mark was fined to 10 thousand rubles. Several days later, after the police came to his house to continue the investigation, he left Russia, fearing for his safety.

In May 2022, an indigenous activist from Pevek (Chukotka region), Igor Ranav, was [fined](#)<sup>43</sup> for his antiwar position (the exact perpetration was the phrase "Yes to the peace! No to the War!" / "Миру — Мир, нет, Войне!"), which he published on one of the social networks).

Several days later, the other indigenous activist from Nenets okrug Konstantin Ledkov has also been [fined](#)<sup>44</sup> for the second time for the phrase "Crimea belongs to Ukraine" / "Крым это Украина".

In July 2022, during the session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples in Geneva, a representative of Shor peoples, Yana Tannagasheva, made a presentation on violations of the indigenous peoples' rights by coal companies in the Kemerovo region. After the presentation, Ms. Tannagasheva was approached by a Russian diplomat, who acted in an intimidating manner by asking for her name, phone number and her business card in a reportedly aggressive way. Numerous delegates of the session, including representatives of indigenous peoples, NGOs, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, [witnessed](#)<sup>45</sup> this incident. The same Russian diplomat later approached the Secretariat of the EMRIP session, asking for information about the list of speakers, including the speakers' names and the organizations they represent.

Later during the session, several states and indigenous delegations made statements condemning the inappropriate behavior of the Russian state representative just in the UN building.

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<sup>42</sup> Марк Здор. Биография - <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KI0xNapCVbgnBvfULdFGSdGCOh-bh4Sx9YUx2mF57cE>

<sup>43</sup> Чукотский активист обвиняется в дискредитации Вооруженных сил РФ - <https://sm.news/chukotskij-aktivist-obvinyaetsya-v-diskreditacii-vooruzhennyx-sil-rf-71340-u3t5/>

<sup>44</sup> В Нарьян-Маре мужчину оштрафовали на 35 тысяч рублей из-за высказываний о Крыме - <https://ovd.news/express-news/2021/05/28/v-naryan-mare-muzhchinu-oshtrafovali-na-35-tysyach-rubley-iz-za-vyskazyvaniy>

<sup>45</sup> The letter of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes to the Russian Federation - <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27565>

Fortunately, Yana Tannagasheva [received](#)<sup>46</sup> political asylum today in Sweden, where she had been forced to escape from Russia after years of intimidation by authorities and coal companies. She is safe now and does not fear threats from the Russian side. But according to her, the Russian diplomat who threatened her during the EMRIP session didn't know that fact as he supposed she continued to live in her village in the Kemerovo region. In this light, the attempt to intimidate the delegate and receive personal data could definitely be considered a severe threat to any indigenous activists who continue to live in Russia and trying to inform international human rights bodies about violations of their indigenous rights.

Immediately after the incident, the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR), the organization Ms. Tannagasheva is part of, issued a [statement](#)<sup>47</sup> condemning the assault on the [website](#)<sup>48</sup> "Indigenous Russia" that is today become the only media that specialize in publishing information about violations of Indigenous rights in Russia. Just after posting the statement, the director of Indigenous Russia received an email from the website's hosting provider, saying it had [received](#)<sup>49</sup> a request from the Russian Government to remove the page from the Internet within 24 hours.

The other side of this problem is that Indigenous leaders and IP rights defenders in Russia are afraid now to express their opinion publicly, especially on the international level where RAIPON's and other Russian [propagandists' voices](#)<sup>50</sup> are primarily heard. Considering the latest restrictive wartime legislation according to which persons who critique the political regime and authorities could be imprisoned for a long term, the voice of indigenous peoples in Russia is now at the lowest level since the Soviet Union.

## **Polarization of the indigenous movement**

Before Vladimir Putin came to his third presidential term in 2012, the indigenous movement in Russia was more or less united behind the idea of protecting Indigenous rights and didn't afraid to confront the state or business if such rights were violated. The biggest Indigenous organization - the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East ([RAIPON](#))<sup>51</sup>, which has regional departments in all regions where indigenous peoples live, represented the interests of most indigenous communities in Moscow.

But this organization came under the complete control of Putin's regime in 2013 after Russian authorities [promoted](#)<sup>52</sup> Grigory Ledkov, a member of the Russian Parliament, to the RAIPON's

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<sup>46</sup> The cost of fighting for Indigenous people and environmental rights in Russia -

<https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/4394-the-cost-of-fighting-for-indigenous-people-and-environmental-rights-in-russia.html>

<sup>47</sup> ICIPR statement against intimidation of indigenous delegates by the Russian state's representative during the EMRIP 15th session in Geneva - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/22619>

<sup>48</sup> Indigenous Russia - <https://indigenous-russia.com>

<sup>49</sup> ICIPR statement at EMRIP 15th session. Agenda # 10. Future work of the Expert Mechanism - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/22796>

<sup>50</sup> Дебаты на Форуме ООН по вопросам коренных народов: переселение Норникелем ненцев на Таймыре - <https://sakhalfire.ru/debaty-na-forume-oon-po-voprosam-korennyh-narodov-pereselenie-nornikelem-nenczev-na-tajmyre>

<sup>51</sup> Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North - <https://arctic-council.org/about/permanent-participants/raipon/>

<sup>52</sup> Moscow staged RAIPON election thriller - <https://barentsobserver.com/en/politics/2013/04/moscow-staged-raipon-election-thriller-03-04>



leadership. After that, the RAIPON's role was primarily reduced to rubber-stamping government decisions institution.

In 2022 while some rare indigenous activists or alliances [protested](#)<sup>53</sup> against the war, RAIPON, in [partnership](#)<sup>54</sup> with some smaller indigenous organizations, since the first days of the war, [approved](#)<sup>55</sup> president Putin's operation against Ukraine. In order to give the impression that all Russian ethnic groups supported the war, Raipon joined with the authorities in numerous patriotic actions in remote indigenous [communities](#)<sup>56</sup> and [cities](#)<sup>57</sup>.

War propaganda became not the only concern of RAIPON in 2022. The other important activity became manhunting and reports to the authorities against those criticizing President Putin's policy. For example, it was Raipon's representatives who [provided](#)<sup>58</sup> the authorities with information about the protest activities of student Mark Zdor, after which the police began to investigate him.

The other example is a [decision](#)<sup>59</sup> of RAIPON's Coordinating Council in April 2022, which applied to the Russian general prosecutor's office to check the website "Indigenous Russia" on extremism that finally came to a decision of the Russian authorities to [ban](#)<sup>60</sup> access to the website from the territory of the Russian Federation.

## Divided peoples

Indigenous peoples whose ancestral lands are divided by national borders suffer additional impacts of the war due to suspending their cross-border cognate ties. The cross-border dimension is particularly evident with the Arctic Indigenous Nations living in Russia and other Arctic countries.

For example, the war in Ukraine has resulted in a [suspension](#)<sup>61</sup> of all cooperation between Russian and non-Russian members of the Sámi Council, the Sámi's main representative body. The

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<sup>53</sup> Statement of the International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/19347>

<sup>54</sup> Открытое заявление лидеров Федеральных национально-культурных автономий и институтов гражданского общества в поддержку решений Президента Российской Федерации -

<https://domnarodov.ru/events/news/otkrytoe-zayavlenie-liderovfederalnyh-nacionalno-kulturnyh-avtonomij-i-institutov-grazhdanskogo-obschestva>

<sup>55</sup> RAIPON supports the decision of President Putin to start the war in Ukraine - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/19434>

<sup>56</sup> Старейшины коренных малочисленных народов Севера и краеведы Олы сняли клип в поддержку России - <https://magadanmedia.ru/news/1274286/>

<sup>57</sup> Нина Вейсалова: "Наши северяне сегодня героически защищают безопасность России, выполняя высокую миссию и государственные задачи" - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/24747>

<sup>58</sup> Марк Здор. Биография - <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KI0xNapCVbgnBvfULdfGSdGCOh-bh4Sx9YUx2mF57cE>

<sup>59</sup> Ассоциация КМНСС и ДВ РФ обратится в Генпрокуратуру РФ с просьбой о проверке iRussia на экстремизм - <https://indigenous-russia.com/archives/20923>

<sup>60</sup> Федеральная служба по надзору в сфере связи, информационных технологий и массовых коммуникаций. Универсальный сервис проверки ограничения доступа к сайтам и (или) страницам сайтов сети «Интернет» - <https://blocklist.rkn.gov.ru>

<sup>61</sup> Cooperation with Russian side on hold - <https://www.saamicouncil.net/news-archive/cooperation-with-russian-side-on-hold>

break followed an explicit expression of support by [some](#)<sup>62</sup> Sámi leaders in Russia for the Russian Government's decision to launch the war against Ukraine. And although not all Russian Sámi organizations endorsed the Government on that issue, the decision to suspend Russian participation was made unanimously by the Executive Board of the Sámi Council, a body that consists of four people, one of which is a representative of Russian Sámi.

In a similar situation are the Russian and foreign parts of the Aleut International Association and Inuit Circumpolar Council. While they didn't announce the break in cooperation with their Russian members officially, the actual contacts are extremely limited.

The growing isolation of the Russian political regime and escalation of its antagonism with the West will likely lead to a further reduction in transborder contacts.

## Conclusions

Indigenous peoples in Russia are among the most vulnerable groups in the Russian population. Dispossessed of their ancestors' lands, they have minimal access to their traditional resources for hunting, fishing and other traditional economic activities. They are also excluded from industrial development decisions on their traditional territories. As a result, many Indigenous communities depend on the state's meager allowance for subsistence.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian indigenous communities have been experiencing increased pressure from the state and businesses, which announced the war support as a main priority of the Nation's current development. While corrupt Russian bureaucrats and extractive companies, using the pretext of wartime, lowering environmental standards for accessing the indigenous traditional lands, the indigenous communities themselves suffer heavy losses due to the unprecedented drafting to the Russian army and the negative influence of the rapidly degrading Russian economy and living standards.

Most remote Indigenous communities of the Russian Arctic, Siberia and the Far East are cut off from alternative sources of information other than state TV channels. Unfortunately, due to the poor quality of life, many indigenous soldiers and their families, drugged by propaganda, see military service as a tool to improve their economic situation.

Proved human losses among indigenous peoples of the Russian Arctic, Siberia, and the Far East because of the war numbered today hundreds of lives. This is a particular disaster for small-numbered indigenous nations for which the loss of any community member is a tragedy.

All the new repressive laws initiated by President Putin to intimidate the Nation, increase Russia's isolation, and expel the last independent media, human rights, and environmental institutions from Russia are incredibly disastrous to the ability of indigenous communities of the Russian Arctic, Siberia, and the Far East to defend their rights and provide information on violations of such rights at international venues, including the UN.

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<sup>62</sup> Samerådets vicepresident hade Z på gitarren – allt samarbete stoppas - <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/sapmi/sameradet-stoppar-samarbete-med-ryssland>